

Attn: Planning, Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee

BEFORE THE SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL

In the Matter of the Application of

CF 308884

SEATTLE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

For approval of a Major Institution Master Plan

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Appeal by Friends of
Children's Hospital

A. Introduction

I am a resident of Laurelhurst and the co-chair of Friends of Children's Hospital.

Friends of Children's Hospital ("Friends") is a group of over 1,000 neighbors, community leaders, friends, doctors, patients, family members and employees who have expressed their support of Seattle Children's Hospital's plans for growth in the Laurelhurst area. Representatives of Friends testified before the hearing examiner at hearings in March and July 2009. In addition, throughout the course of the MIMP process, Friends spoke out regularly in support of the plan, including at Citizens Advisory Committee meetings and at the hearing on the draft EIS. During the course of the process, several hundred letters outlining the reasons for support of the hospital's plans were submitted by neighbors, community leaders, and other supporters of the MIMP. These letters are all part of the record in this matter, along with the record of public comments in support of the hospital's plans throughout the process.

Friends of Children's Hospital appeals the recommendation of the hearing examiner, and requests that the City Council approve the master plan.

B. Specific Objections to the Hearing Examiner's Recommendation that the Council Deny the Master Plan

- 1.) In applying the balancing test on pages 29-30, the hearing examiner appears to have concluded that public benefit derived from the expansion is

outweighed by the need to protect the “livability and vitality” of Laurelhurst and other nearby neighborhoods. The record does not support such a conclusion.

The record makes it clear that the “livability and vitality” of Laurelhurst and other neighborhoods will remain strong after expansion. Unfortunately, the hearing examiner has apparently misinterpreted the repeated objections by the Laurelhurst Community Council as constituting evidence of a significant threat to the livability and vitality of the Laurelhurst neighborhood. A review of the record will reveal that while a few Laurelhurst residents have very strenuously expressed their concerns that the neighborhood is threatened by the plan, there is no evidence that the “livability and vitality” of Laurelhurst is in jeopardy. The Citizens Advisory Committee recommended approval of the plan after scores of public meetings, and a large number of residents of Laurelhurst and nearby neighborhoods have provided written comments or spoken in support of the plan. The director of DPD reached similar conclusions to the Citizens Advisory Committee. The record does not support the hearing examiner’s conclusions in respect to the balancing required by SMC 23.69.002.

2. Similarly, the hearing examiner has apparently misread or misinterpreted the record in regard to the extent of the impacts of the plan on Laurelhurst and other neighborhoods. SMC 23.69.025 provides for a balancing of the “needs of the Major Institutions to develop facilities for the provision of health care” with “the need to minimize the impact of Major Institution development on surrounding neighborhoods.” The record shows that the plan has been repeatedly modified and improved to minimize the impacts on Laurelhurst and other communities. While there will certainly be some impact on the neighborhood, the design of the facility and the traffic mitigation features have been designed to “minimize the impact of Major Institution development on surrounding neighborhoods,” as required by SMC 23.69.025.

The hearing examiner put undue weight on the small increase in time it may take Laurelhurst residents and other nearby neighborhoods “to get to work and back, to shop, and to complete other tasks of daily life.” One benefit of

living in the Laurelhurst neighborhood is having a relatively short commute time to downtown Seattle compared to other Puget Sound residents. That benefit will not go away, even if the commute time is slightly longer. Unfortunately, every resident of Seattle has to deal with traffic issues, stemming from a wide variety of sources. There is nothing in the record to support the notion that the small inconvenience of traffic associated with the care of seriously ill children should be shifted to another neighborhood to avoid a slight increase in the commute times of Laurelhurst residents.

3. In her balancing discussion, the hearing examiner's concluded, incorrectly, that the Laurelhurst site is the proverbial round hole for a "square peg. " Laurelhurst has been the site of the hospital for the last 56 years. During that time, Laurelhurst residents have bought homes there and raised their children near the hospital. The record shows that virtually every resident in Laurelhurst values the hospital, and sees a benefit in having the hospital close to them and their families. Contrary to the hearing examiner's decision, the record shows that the hospital is not a square peg in a round hole. The hospital is in a location where it can be accessed by most Seattle families in emergencies relatively quickly, and is close to the resources and physicians associated with UW Medicine. The hearing examiner's recommendation and "square peg" analogy does not reflect the community's strong need and desire to continue to have Children's provide services in Laurelhurst.

The hearing examiner appears to have concluded that the LCC's opposition to significant expansion in Laurelhurst reflects the views of the broader community, and makes the expansion a bad fit. In fact, a review of the record reveals that the community supports Children's growth in Laurelhurst, and that Children's is in no way a square hole. The urban village analysis in no way addresses the need or appropriateness of the Children's expansion in Laurelhurst.

The record in this matter demonstrates that the plan strikes a reasonable balance between the needs to provide health care with the need to minimize the impact on surrounding neighborhoods. If anything, the balance struck with this major institution plan could be criticized as putting too little weight

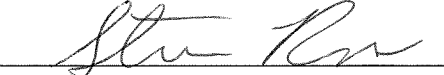
on the need for advanced medical care in critical situations for all of Seattle's children, and too much weight on the concerns of the Laurelhurst neighborhood. If there is an increased need for pediatric medical care in Seattle, unfortunately it will have some impact on some neighborhood, somewhere; to accept the hearing examiner's conclusions is simply to require some other neighborhood to absorb any inconveniences and impacts associated with expansion. Laurelhurst and the other neighborhoods that surround Children's are great places to live now. Those neighborhoods will remain great places to live even with the expansion of Children's.

C. Relief Sought

Friends of Children's Hospital requests that the City Council approve the Major Institution Master Plan, with any appropriate conditions deemed necessary by the Council.

Friends of Children's Hospital

August 25, 2009

By 

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